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Literary Analysis

Although characters may be the most important part of making a story, the process of how an author forms and describes characters is not something readers think about often. The process involves the author deciding how he or she wants to explain or show the character. An author uses direct or indirect presentation to allow the reader to interpret each character. Through direct presentation, the author tells the reader about the characters by using examination, and through indirect presentation, the author shows the characters by their actions (Arp 162). When creating a character, an author also has to consider how he or she will make each character convincing. The criteria to do so are that the characters are consistent with their behavior, the character’s actions are understandable to the reader, and the characters are believable (Arp 163). In the story “Interpreter of Maladies” by Jhumpa Lahiri, Mr. Kapasi is a convincing character.

In “Interpreter of Maladies,” Mr. Kapasi encompasses all three of the criteria necessary to making a character convincible. Mr. Kapasi follows the first criteria, which is being consistent in behavior. Mr. Kapasi is fairly consistent in his behavior throughout the story. In the beginning of the story, Mr. Kapasi observes the family he is about to take on a tour in India. Basically acting as an outsider looking in on other people’s lives, Mr. Kapasi is observant throughout most of the story. Although the reader does learn a little about Mr. Kapasi’s personal life, he focuses mainly on the Das family. One example of Mr. Kapasi’s observant behavior is when he is looking at Mrs. Das toward the beginning of the story. The process of Mr. Kapasi watching Mrs. Das come back to the car for the tour is very descriptive and shows the way in which Mr. Kapasi examines people throughout the story. Another example toward the end of story is when wanting him to give her a cure for the way she feels, Mrs. Das confides in Mr. Kapasi her secret about cheating on her husband. Mr. Kapasi is an interpreter and observer, since he listens to Mrs. Das’ problems carefully and asks her if she feels guilty about her actions. Although Mr. Kapasi’s response is not what Mrs. Das expects, the process of him interpreting her issues shows Mr. Kapasi’s observational nature. Even at the very end of the story, once the Das family is about to go back to their hotel after their son gets attacked by a monkey, Mr. Kapasi acts as the bystander. He watches their dysfunctional behavior, “knowing that this was the picture of the Das family he would preserve forever in his mind” (Lahiri 159). “In Interpreter of Maladies,” Mr. Kapasi’s behavior is fairly consistent.

Mr. Kapasi also follows the criteria of being a convincing character by acting in an understandable way. For example, when Mr. Kapasi wants to continue talking to Mrs. Das after she inquires about his job as an interpreter for a doctor, his action is recognizable. Mr. Kapasi obviously likes the attention he receives and also enjoys someone taking interest in the profession that his own wife considers routine and unimportant. Mr. Kapasi also acts in a way that is understandable when he lets his mind wander while thinking about the letters he and Mrs. Das will write to each other. After Mrs. Das asks for Mr. Kapasi’s address, he starts to imagine what the two will write about, and he thinks that “their friendship would grow, and flourish” (Lahiri 150). Although Mr. Kapasi’s thoughts are a bit farfetched, his feelings are understandable. He is in a marriage with a woman who does not seem considerate of Mr. Kapasi’s feelings, and he uses the idea of a relationship with Mrs. Das to escape from the reality he does not want to face. Mr. Kapasi relishes in the attention from other people because he is not appreciated very much in either of his jobs. As an interpreter for the doctor, Mr. Kapasi feels as if his talent is going to waste, and as a tour guide, most of the people are too involved in their tour to pay much attention to Mr. Kapasi. He is simply lonely, and that causes Mr. Kapasi to act in a way that readers are able to identify with. Overall, Mr. Kapasi’s actions are understandable for the reader in “Interpreter of Maladies.”

Another way in which Mr. Kapasi follows the criteria for a convincing character is that he is a plausible character. Throughout “Interpreter of Maladies,” Mr. Kapasi is a kind, attentive, and somewhat misunderstood person. Although Mr. Kapasi has some flaws, he is still a good person. One of Mr. Kapasi’s flaws is his infatuation for Mrs. Das, who is shallow and self concerned. Although Mr. Kapasi falters in this uncharacteristic interest, he eventually sees Mrs. Das for what she really is, and does not like her as much as before. Mr. Kapasi makes mistakes in judgment just like anyone else and does seem like a person who could actually exist. His imperfections are not too extreme, and his kindness is not over represented either. Throughout “Interpreter of Maladies,” Mr. Kapasi has an appropriate balance of the traits that make a character realistic.

In the story “Interpreter of Maladies,” the author explains the character of Mr. Kapasi through indirect presentation. The reader interprets Mr. Kapasi through his actions, and shows that he is a round character, which means he is “complex and many-sided” (Arp 163-4). Mr. Kapasi is a round character because he is not simply one-dimensional and has true emotions and feelings, such as his loneliness and slight obsession with Mrs. Das. Mr. Kapasi is a consistent, understandable, and realistic character throughout the story. In “Interpreter of Maladies,” Mr. Kapasi portrays a convincing character.

Works Cited

Lahiri, Jhumpa. “Interpreter of Maladies.” Perrine's Literature Structure, Sound, and Sense. Ed. Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson. 9th ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 1970. 141-159.

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